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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 223rd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 20 September 1996, at 10:30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. KA (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN ON THE INTERNATIONAL NGO MEETING AND EUROPEAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE, HELD AT THE PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA, FROM 2 TO 4 SEPTEMBER 1996

2. The CHAIRMAN reported that the Committee's decision to hold the combined 1996 International NGO Meeting and the European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine in Geneva instead of in the territories under Palestinian authority had been taken in the light of the current restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government on freedom of movement between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Meeting had been attended by 31 experts and by the representatives of 80 non-governmental organizations, 26 Governments, 9 United Nations agencies and bodies, 3 intergovernmental organizations, 4 non-governmental organization coordinating committees and a Palestinian delegation. The central theme of the combined meeting had been "Building NGO partnerships for a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine".

3. At the opening session, messages had been received from the Secretary-General of the United Nations and from the President of Palestine. The invited experts, who had included members of the Palestinian Council, the Israeli Knesset and the European Parliament and leading academics from different regions, had made presentations in three plenary sessions, which had been followed by lively and frank discussions that had reflected the great concern of all participants that the accords concluded by the parties should be implemented and the peace process continued. Participating non-governmental organizations had adopted a final statement welcoming the positive developments in the Middle East peace process but expressing concern at the repeated delays in the implementation of the letter and spirit of the Agreements. Certain measures by the Israeli Government, including the ongoing incarceration of Palestinian prisoners, the closure of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem and acts of intimidation, humiliation and punishment against Palestinians, had created new and significant obstacles for the peace process, thereby undermining confidence and posing a serious threat to a just and lasting peace.

4. The non-governmental organizations had reiterated their support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, return, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. Countries hosting Palestinian refugees should observe and preserve their civil, social and political rights until such time as they could exercise their right of return. For its part, the United Nations should play a key role in the pursuit of a negotiated settlement and the international community should fulfil the commitments it had given to assist the efforts of the Palestinian people at nation-building and political, economic and social development. The non-governmental organizations had requested the United States and the European Union to urge Israel to comply with the Agreements, congratulated the

Palestinian Authority on the conduct of the first elections and reaffirmed their support for the consolidation of the rule of law, democratic values, political pluralism and the full enjoyment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

5. The non-governmental organizations had also declared their obligation to lobby their respective Governments, register their concern regarding Israel's compliance with the Agreements and make concerted efforts to publicize any Israeli violation of Palestinian human rights. They had urged the development of Israeli/Palestinian/NGO cooperation, based on mutual understanding and commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, and had pledged to generate public support for the Palestinian people through campaigns focusing on the themes of the future of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements and their expansion in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, and the Palestinian refugees' right of return.

6. For its part, the delegation of the Committee had exchanged views with the chairpersons and other members of the International and European Coordinating Committees on the objectives and modalities of future cooperation. The report of the meeting would be issued in due course as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

7. He took it that the Committee wished to take note of the report by the Chairman and the statement adopted by the non-governmental organizations participating in the Meeting.

8. It was so decided.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

9. The CHAIRMAN, reporting on certain actions taken by the Bureau since the Committee's previous meeting, said that, in a press release issued on 10 September 1996, the Bureau had expressed its satisfaction at the resumption, on 4 September, at Beit Hanoun (Gaza Strip), of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. The meeting between the President of the Palestinian Authority and the Prime Minister of Israel was an important step towards the full implementation of the Agreements already reached between the two sides. The Bureau had expressed the hope that the meeting would clear the way for the continuation of substantive discussions on matters pertaining to the permanent status and had reiterated the Committee's strong support for the current peace process and its determination to spare no effort in promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and statehood.

10. With reference to the Security Council's decision to simplify the list of items of which it was seized, he had conveyed the Committee's objection to the decision to delete from the list items related to the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the question of Palestine and the Middle East problem. He had stated the Committee's belief that, pending a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, those items should remain on the list of matters of which the

Council was seized, since they continued to engage the latter's responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

11. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) first expressed displeasure at the Secretariat's failure to provide interpretation into Arabic for the meeting in progress. Arabic was an official language of the United Nations and the question of Palestine was an Arab issue. He hoped that the situation would not be repeated in the future.

12. The Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine had earlier that day dispatched letters to other Missions to the United Nations in which it had shared its views on recent political developments in the occupied Palestinian territory and on the work to be done on the situation in the Middle East during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. The current situation in the Middle East was not encouraging. The new Israeli Government had approved guidelines which were contrary to both the spirit and letter of the two binding Agreements which Israel had signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization, namely, the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It had made it clear, moreover, that the timetables laid down in those Agreements would not be respected and had continued with other dangerous violations of the Agreements, including the seizure of Palestinian territory, the intentional delay in its redeployment from Hebron, its continuous attempts to create new facts on the ground in occupied East Jerusalem, and the resumption of colonial settlement activities in the occupied territories, in contravention of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. It was common knowledge that the Israeli Minister of Defence had recently authorized the building of 1,800 housing units within existing illegal settlements, in addition to the 2,200 units that were pending.

13. The consequence of those activities would be to reverse the peace process as a whole. Even recent developments which had been rightly seen as positive, such as the meeting between President Arafat and Prime Minister Nètanyahu and between the former and the Israeli Defence Minister, had unfortunately not resulted in positive changes on the ground, and the situation therefore continued to require the earnest efforts of all Members of the Organization.

14. Since the start of the Middle East peace process, the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine had maintained that the United Nations must provide its full support for the process and for the positions of principle adopted by the international community on the question of Palestine. Indeed, the Organization's responsibilities on the question of Palestine did not end with the beginning of the peace process. That was the view of the vast majority of the Organization's Members and, in that connection, the fiftieth session of the General Assembly had adopted a useful package of resolutions on the issue, including the mandates of the relevant committees. At its fifty-first session, the Assembly should reiterate the just positions on the Palestinian question based on international law and the Charter which it had reaffirmed in previous years.

15. More specifically, the General Assembly must stress at its fifty-first session the principle of statehood for the Palestinian people and the issue of Israeli settler colonialism. A resolution on the permanent sovereignty of the

Palestinian people over their natural resources should be introduced in the Second Committee. The Assembly should draw attention to Israel's lack of compliance with the Agreements reached and condemn such Israeli practices as the sealing off of Palestinian territory and the confiscation of Palestinian land. The Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine would also seek action by the Security Council if the Israeli Government persisted with its programme of colonial settlements.

16. He wished, finally, to express concern at the failure of the Department of Public Information to implement the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly with respect to the dissemination of information on the Palestinian question. He hoped that there would be serious movement in that area before the relevant resolution was introduced in the fifty-first session.

17. Mr. FARHADI (Afghanistan) said that, given the recent developments in the Middle East, the Committee should intensify its efforts in support of the peace process. The resolutions which it proposed for adoption by the General Assembly should be adapted to the new situation on the ground. The Committee should also express its views on such issues as statehood for the Palestinian people and sovereignty over their natural resources and should seek maximum support from both members and non-members for the draft resolutions which it proposed to the General Assembly. It was important for the sponsors of the draft resolutions to take the floor in the General Assembly and, in that connection, a background paper prepared by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine on recent developments in the Middle East would be most useful.

18. Ms. DARMANIN (Malta) said that she was greatly concerned by the information just given by the Permanent Observer for Palestine, particularly the information on Israeli settlement practices in the occupied territories. Malta reiterated its full support for the cause of the Palestinian people.

19. Mr. POERNOMO (Indonesia) said that he too was concerned by the Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, which were contrary to the spirit of the Agreements reached. Indonesia stood ready to cooperate with the Committee at the fifty-first session to defend the interests of the Palestinian people.

20. Mr. REYES RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that the cooperation of all members of the Committee was essential, particularly in the light of the information just provided by the Permanent Observer for Palestine. Cuba was ready to collaborate in the elaboration of the draft resolutions, and supported the suggestions made by the representative of Afghanistan aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the Committee's work.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.